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CONTENTS

Moscow and the Eurocommunists:	
Prague Meeting Changes Little	1
Ministry of Foreign Trade	
Reorganization	4
Publications of Interest	6

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RP ASU 77-011
19 May 1977

25X1

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Moscow and the Eurocommunists: Prague Meeting Changes Little

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The international conference of 75 Communist Parties which met in Prague on April 27-29 was something of a fiasco for its Soviet organizers

The Soviets clearly intended the meeting to serve at least two principal purposes. One was to aid in the Sisyphean task of holding together the Communist movement and maintaining Soviet authority over it, which has preoccupied Moscow for the last two decades. The other was more specific and immediate--to rally the fraternal parties around the Soviet position on the troublesome issue of the treatment of political dissidents within the USSR and the bloc. Moscow has been nettled by the fact that it has had to endure criticism on this point not only from hostile, bourgeois sources, but also from within the ranks of the Western European Communist movement.

Moscow's apparent efforts to create at least the appearance of harmony and solidarity within the movement in Prague were handicapped from the beginning. The Prague meeting, technically only a gathering of representatives of the parties affiliated with the international Communist journal, *Problems of Peace and Socialism*, in fact appears to have come about because of the failure of an earlier effort to convene a pan-European conference of Communist parties.

Moscow had tasked with the job of sounding out the other Western parties on their willingness to attend such a conference. When this proposal failed to rouse any response among the major Western parties, Moscow fell back on the device of calling a working meeting in Prague.

While the Soviets were successful in organizing the Prague meeting, they failed in their apparent efforts to

RP ASU 77-011
19 May 198

SECRET

convert it into a major international conference by ensuring high-level representation. Despite an intensive Soviet lobbying effort just a few days before the conference, the Eurocommunist parties--among them the important Italian, French, and Spanish parties--reportedly agreed among themselves to send relatively low-level delegates.

The discrepancy was embarrassingly obvious in Prague. While the Soviet delegation was headed by Central Committee Secretary Boris Ponomarev, and many of the delegations from the smaller and more dependent parties were headed by the party leaders, the big three of Eurocommunism were represented only at the Central Committee level. Similarly, the chieftains of the French and Italian parties, Georges Marchais and Enrico Berlinguer, chose to underline their absence from Prague with a well-publicized tete-a-tete in Rome while the Prague meeting was in session.

25X1X Soviet efforts to muster a show of solidarity at the conference fell equally flat. 25X1X

an initial Soviet-backed proposal to have the conference issue a public resolution on the movement encountered the strong opposition of the Eurocommunists and was withdrawn. 25X1X

a second Soviet effort to engineer a statement of solidarity, this time on the noncontroversial subject of South African apartheid, was beaten down in similar fashion. 25X1

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The Soviets must have been equally disappointed in their failure to muster general support for their position on the difficult issue of "human rights." Ponomarev stated the Soviet case in strong terms in his formal address to the conference. In the published version of his remarks, he warned that Western criticism of Moscow's suppression of political dissidents was aimed not only at the Soviets, but was also intended to divide the Communist movement and undermine the Western parties. Ponomarev also revealed Moscow's sensitivity to Eurocommunist efforts to disavow the Soviet experience when he denounced efforts to "Russify" the October revolution.

RP ASU 77-011
19 May 1977

SECRET

We have no indication that Moscow formally requested that the full conference support the Soviet position on the "human rights" question. This suggests that the initial Soviet soundings may have convinced them that it would be impossible to realize this hope at the conference.

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There is no reason to believe that the meeting made any progress toward narrowing the gap between the pro-Soviet parties and the Eurocommunists. If anything, Moscow's clumsy efforts to elevate the Prague meeting into a full-fledged international party conference may have aggravated Soviet relations with the Eurocommunists.

Even without this, there are other signs that further trouble between Moscow and the Eurocommunists may be brewing.

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RP ASU 77-011
19 May 1977

SECRET

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Ministry of Foreign Trade Reorganization

The genesis of present efforts to restructure the foreign trade apparatus is found in the speeches of General Secretary Brezhnev and Premier Kosygin at the Party Congress in February and March 1976. Both stressed the need to better direct production to foreign markets and shape import policy to meet national economic goals. Brezhnev alluded to organizational changes when he said that management of foreign economic relations must be integrated, combining politics, economics, diplomacy, commerce, production, and trade.

According to a Soviet economist, Minister of Foreign Trade Patolichev had blocked all attempts after the previous congress in 1971 to alter the foreign trade structure. As soon as this congress closed last year, a group of experts reportedly met to discuss foreign trade management. Last summer, the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers adopted a decree on foreign economic relations, reportedly over the protests of Patolichev.

The decree, as yet unpublished, apparently outlined general objectives but left open the question of how to achieve them. Few measures have yet been taken. Last fall, some steps were reportedly taken to orient industry to produce for Western markets. In addition, the role of the State Committee for Science and Technology (SCST) in the trade negotiating process has been reduced.

The proposed concept involves granting end-user ministries more voice in foreign trade negotiations, with a consequent dilution of control by the Ministry of Foreign Trade (MFT). Some Soviets expect legislation to be ready by the middle of this summer. Differences in their accounts of impending measures indicate that disagreement among Moscow bureaucracies continues and firm decisions have probably not been made.

RP ASU 77-011
19 May 1977

SECRET

Discussion centers on more closely associating the MFT's Foreign Trade Organizations (FTOs) with industrial ministries. Trade negotiations would be conducted by teams consisting of representatives from the MFT, the SCST, and the appropriate ministry. There is disagreement over whether the FTOs will remain subordinate to the MFT or will be incorporated into the industrial ministries. Some Soviet officials say the changes will be tried on an experimental basis in half a dozen FTOs, with full-scale reorganization still problematical and years away. Others claim an across-the-board realignment is imminent.

Change is being pushed by longtime critics of the MFT in the SCST, Gosplan, some industrial ministries, and academic institutes. They cite the growing role of foreign trade in the Soviet economy to explain the current high-level concern about its management. SCST officials argue that expanding the influence of end-user ministries will increase the attention given product quality in negotiations and will blunt the MFT's preoccupation with buying the cheapest product.

Patolichev has been the subject of reports concerning retirement during the past year.

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The two officials most often discussed by the Soviets as Patolichev's replacement are Gosbank Chairman V. S. Alkhimov and SCST Deputy Chairman D. M. Gvishiani Alkhimov, until recently deputy minister of the MFT, is a proponent of expanded trade with the West and has spoken disparagingly about the competence of other MFT officials in this regard. Gvishiani, son-in-law to Kosygin, has for years been at the center of the rivalry between the SCST and the MFT. He has reportedly been approached about taking the job but declined unless given authority to carry out his own programs.

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